

Fort Davis

National Historic Site

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Curriculum Materials Grades 6-8

Student Activity: The Apache

The Apache

Around the 17th century, groups of Apache and Comanche began to migrate to the Trans-Pecos region of west Texas. The Apache were predominant in the Fort Davis area. The Comanche and Kiowa were further east, but they sometimes moved through west Texas while conducting raids into northern Mexico.

Apache were nomadic hunters and gatherers at that time. By the 1800s, few Apache actually lived in west Texas, except for some Mescalero Apache who occupied seasonal villages in the Davis Mountains and the Big Bend.



A group of Apache near wickiups (National Archives photo)

For shelter, Apache used tipis, ramadas, and wickiups. Tipis had hide covers. Ramadas were open-air shelters constructed of poles set in the ground and connected by cross poles covered by brush. Wickiups were constructed of a circle of poles bent over and thatched together, then covered with natural vegetation such as yucca,

scrub, or grass; a smoke hole was left at the top, and a low door was covered by a piece of animal hide, canvas or a blanket.

Food was gathered according to the season. The Apache diet included a variety of game, berries, and nuts. Game included deer, pronghorn, and rabbits, and often the meat was preserved by drying it into thin sheets of jerky. Piñon nuts and agave—known as mescal (“century plant”), were two of the most important staples. Berries and cactus fruit were eaten raw. Nuts were eaten fresh, or they were roasted, ground into flour using a metate and mano, then baked as bread. When Apaches harvested mescal, they baked the hearts or roots of the plant; this food could then be stored almost indefinitely.

The responsibilities of women and men were clearly defined. Women were in charge of household chores. They gathered, preserved, and stored food, prepared the meals, collected firewood, and carried water. Women cared for and educated the children. They also cured animal hides and fashioned them into clothing and shelter.

Most of the men's time was occupied with hunting, defense, and raiding. Each warrior had to make and maintain his own tools, weapons, horse gear, and ceremonial items. His weapons included lances, knives, bows and arrows, and war clubs.

The spiritual world was very important to the Apache. There were both medicine men and medicine women whose main job was to bring rain, to predict future events, to ward off evil spirits and sickness, and to ensure success in hunting, war, raids, love and other endeavors. Each of them had a medicine bag containing items such as plants, feathers, crystals, and arrowheads that were considered sacred. Lozen, sister of Victorio, was a medicine woman who Apaches believed had the power to sense the location of the enemy.



Apache Bride (National Archives photo)

As European Americans began traveling west in the 1800s, the struggle began between newcomers trying to control the land and the Apache trying to retain their way of life. From that time on, the way of life for the Apache would never be the same.

Today many Apache live on reservations in New Mexico and Arizona, and others live in cities and towns elsewhere. Most have assimilated into the mainstream culture, while retaining aspects of their Apache history and traditions.

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Questions:

Discuss these questions in class or write your answers on a separate paper.

1. How would you like to be part of a nomadic culture in which your family moved every few months as game migrated, seasons changed, or different plants ripened?

2. Discuss how American Indians used natural materials (plants & animals) for survival. Do you think you could live off the land completely like they did historically?
3. Do you think the division of responsibilities was fair between men and women? Why?
4. If you were an Apache medicine man or woman, what would you specialize in (i.e. curing the sick, match-making, controlling the weather, bravery in raids, etc.)? What would you carry in your medicine bag?
5. How would you feel if another group of people invaded your territory and forced you to change your culture forever?
6. Which type of house would you like to live in—tipi, ramada, or wickiup? Explain. Would you miss electricity and things like television? You may wish to draw a picture of your housing choice. Compare these traditional Apache structures with houses today.
7. Over the years, fewer young people of American Indian heritage seem to immerse themselves in tribal traditions, and many do not know their native language. If you were a modern-day member of an American Indian tribe, would you lean more toward traditional native culture (studying, learning, and carrying it on) or toward the mainstream, technology-oriented culture in America? Explain.

Enrichment:

1. Research and construct some of the tools or weapons used historically by the Apache.
2. Research medicine men and women, then make a medicine bag. You may wish to choose Lozen, a Warm Springs Apache and Victorio's sister, who was considered a prophet, shaman, and skilled markswoman.
3. Research one or more of the 19th-century Apache leaders and write an essay.